# The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand

## Dedicated to the Waistmakers of 1909

In the black of the winter of nineteen nine,  
When we froze and bled on the picket line,  
We showed the world that women could fight  
And we rose and won with women's might.

Chorus:  
Hail the waistmakers of nineteen nine,  
Making their stand on the picket line,  
Breaking the power of those who reign,  
Pointing the way, smashing the chain.

And we gave new courage to the men  
Who carried on in nineteen ten  
And shoulder to shoulder we'll win through,  
Led by the I.L.G.W.U.

From Let's Sing! Educational Department, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, New York City, n.d.

The Cooper Union Meeting of 1909

From *The Call*, with Samuel Gompers

The Triangle walkout, sparked by grievances common throughout the shirtwaist industry, exploded into a general strike. First published in *The Call*, November 23, 1909.

The decision to strike was reached yesterday at the Cooper Union meeting which was addressed by Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL.

Gompers was given an ovation when he was introduced by Chairman Benjamin Feigenbaum. The vast crowd rose to its feet and cheered him very enthusiastically for several minutes.

"A man would be less than human," said Gompers, in opening, "if he were not impressed with your reception. I want you men and women not to give all your enthusiasm for a man, no matter who he may be. I would prefer that you put all of your enthusiasm into your union and your cause."

Continuing, Gompers said: "I have never declared a strike in all my life. I have done my share to prevent strikes, but there comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists."

Speaking of the possibility of a general strike, Gompers said: "Yes, Mr. Shirtwaist Manufacturer, it may be inconvenient for you if your boys and girls go out on strike, but there are things of more importance than your convenience and your profit. There are the lives of the boys and girls working in your business."

Appealing to the men and women to stand together, he declared: 'If you had an organization before this, it would have stood there as a challenge to the employers who sought to impose such conditions as you bear.

"This is the time and the opportunity, and I doubt if you let it pass whether it can be created again in five or ten years or a generation. I say, friends, do not enter too hastily but when you can't get the manufacturers to give you what you want, then strike. And when you strike, let the manufacturers know you are on strike!

"I ask you to stand together," said Gompers in conclusion, "to have faith in yourselves, to be true to your comrades. If you strike, be cool, calm, collected and determined. Let your watchword be: Union and progress, and until then no surrender!"

This was greeted with a storm of applause.

Clara Lemlich, who was badly beaten up by thugs during the strike in the shop of Louis Leiserson, interrupted Jacob Panken just as he started to speak, saying: "I wanted to say a few words." Cries came from all parts of the hall, "Getup on the platform!" Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with flashing black eyes to the stage, and she said simply: "I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!"

As the tremulous voice of the girl died away, the audience rose en masse and cheered her to the echo. A grim sea of faces, with high purpose and resolve, they shouted and cheered the declaration of war for living conditions hoarsely.

Leon Stein, ed., *Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy* (New York: Quadrangle/New Times Book Company, 1977), pp. 68-70

The Kheel Center would like to thank Mrs. Miriam Stein and Barbara Ismail for granting permission to use selections from the late Leon Stein's book.

# My First Job

## By Rose Cohen

Rose Cohen was a sweatshop worker and a survivor of the Triangle Factory Fire.

About the same time that the bitter cold came father told me one night that he had found work for me in a shop where he knew the presser. I lay awake long that night. I was eager to begin life on my own responsibility but was also afraid. We arose earlier than usual that morning for father had to take me to the shop and not be over late for his own work. I wrapped my thimble and scissors, with a piece of bread for breakfast, in a bit of newspaper, carefully stuck two needles into the lapel of my coat and we started.

The shop was on Pelem Street, a shop district one block long and just wide enough for two ordinary sized wagons to pass each other. We stopped at a door where I noticed at once a brown shining porcelain knob and a half rubbed off number seven. Father looked at his watch and at me.

"Don't look so frightened," he said. "You need not go in until seven. Perhaps if you start in at this hour he will think you have been in the habit of beginning at seven and will not expect you to come in earlier. Remember, be independent. At seven o'clock rise and go home no matter whether the others go or stay."

He began to tell me something else but broke off suddenly, said "good-bye" over his shoulder and went away quickly. I watched him until he turned into Monroe Street.

Now only I felt frightened, and waiting made me nervous, so I tried the knob. The door yielded heavily and closed slowly. I was half way up when it closed entirely, leaving me in darkness. I groped my way to the top of the stairs and hearing a clattering noise of machines, I felt about, found a door, and pushed it open and went in. A tall, beardless man stood folding coats at a table. I went over and asked him for the name (I don't remember what it was.) "Yes," he said crossly. "What do you want?"

I said, "I am the new feller hand." He looked at me from head to foot. My face felt so burning hot that I could scarcely see.

"It is more likely," he said, "that you can pull bastings than fell sleeve lining." Then turning from me he shouted over the noise of the machine: "Presser, is this the girl?" The presser put down the iron and looked at me. "I suppose so," he said, "I only know the father."

The cross man looked at me again and said, "Let's see what you can do." He kicked a chair, from which the back had been broken off, to the finisher's table, threw a coat upon it and said, raising the corner of his mouth: "Make room for the new feller hand."

One girl tittered, two men glanced at me over their shoulders and pushed their chairs apart a little. By this time I scarcely knew what I was about. I laid my coat down somewhere and pushed my bread into the sleeve. Then I stumbled into the bit of space made for me at the table, drew in the chair and sat down. The men were so close to me at each side I felt the heat of their bodies and could not prevent myself from shrinking away. The men noticed and probably felt hurt. One made a joke, the other laughed and the girls bent their heads low over their work. All at once the thought came: "If I don't do this coat quickly and well he will send me away at once." I picked up the coat, threaded my needle, and began hastily, repeating the lesson father impressed upon me. "Be careful not to twist the sleeve lining, take small false stitches."

My hands trembled so that I could not hold the needle properly. It took me a long while to do the coat. But at last it was done. I took it over to the boss and stood at the table waiting while he was examining it. He took long, trying every stitch with his needle. Finally he put it down and without looking at me gave me two other coats. I felt very happy! When I sat down at the table I drew my knees close together and stitched as quickly as I could.

When the pedlar (sic) came into the shop everybody bought rolls. I felt hungry but I was ashamed and would not eat the plain, heavy rye bread while the others ate rolls.

All day I took my finished work and laid it on the boss's table. He would glance at the clock and give me other work. Before the day was over I knew that this was a "piece work shop," that there were four machines and sixteen people were working. I also knew that I had done almost as much work as "the grown-up girls" and that they did not like me. I heard Betsy, the head feller hand, talking about "a snip of a girl coming and taking the very bread out of your mouth." The only one who could have been my friend was the presser who knew my father. But him I did not like. The worst I knew about him just now was that he was a soldier because the men called him so. But a soldier, I had learned, was capable of anything. And so, noticing that he looked at me often, I studiously kept my eyes from his corner of the room.

Seven o'clock came and everyone worked on. I wanted to rise as father had told me to do and go home. But I had not the courage to stand up alone. I kept putting off going from minute to minute. My neck felt stiff and my back ached. I wished there were a back to my chair so that I could rest against it a little. When the people began to go home it seemed to me that it had been night a long time.

The next morning when I came into the shop at seven o'clock, I saw at once that all the people were there and working steadily as if they had been at work a long while. I had just time to put away my coat and go over to the table, when the boss shouted gruffly, "Look here, girl, if you want to work here you better come in early. No office hours in my shop." It seemed very still in the room, even the machines stopped. And his voice sounded dreadfully distinct. I hastened into the bit of space between the two men and sat down. He brought me two coats and snapped, "Hurry with these!"

From this hour a hard life began for me. He refused to employ me except by the week. He paid me three dollars and for this he hurried me from early until late. He gave me only two coats at a time to do. When I took them over and as he handed me the new work he would say quickly and sharply, "Hurry!" And when he did not say it in words he looked at me and I seemed to hear even more plainly, "Hurry!" I hurried but he was never satisfied. By looks and manner he made me feel that I was not doing enough Late at night when the people would standup and begin to fold their work away and I too would rise, feeling stiff in every limb and thinking with dread of our cold empty little room and the uncooked rice, he would come over with still another coat.

"I need it the first thing in the morning," he would give as an excuse. I understood that he was taking advantage of me because I was a child. And now that it was dark in the shop except for the low single gas jet over my table and the one over his at the other end of the room, and there was no one to see, more tears fell on the sleeve lining as I bent over it than there were stitches in it.

I did not soon complain to father. I had given him an idea of the people and the work during the first days. But when I had been in the shop a few weeks I told him, "The boss is hurrying the life out of me." I know now that if I had put it less strongly he would have paid more attention to it. Father hated to hear things put strongly. Besides he himself worked very hard. He never came home before eleven and he left at five in the morning.

He said to me now, "Work a little longer until you have more experience; then you can be independent."

"But if I did piece work, father, I would not have to hurry so. And I could go home earlier when the other people go."

Father explained further, "It pays him better to employ you by the week. Don't you see if you did piece work he would have to pay you as much as he pays a woman piece worker? But this way he gets almost as much work out of you for half the amount a woman is paid."

I myself did not want to leave the shop for fear of losing a day or even more perhaps in finding other work. To lose half a dollar meant that it would take so much longer before mother and the children would come. And now I wanted them more than ever before. I longed for my mother and a home where it would be light and warm and she would be waiting when we came from work.

See document: [Nightmare of Survival](http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/testimonials/ootss_LeonStein.html) by Leon Stein.

Leon Stein, ed., Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy (New York: Quadrangle/New Times Book Company, 1977), pp. 194-195.

The Kheel Center would like to thank Mrs. Miriam Stein and Barbara Ismail for granting permission to use selections from the late Leon Stein's book.

# Letter to Michael and Hugh

## From Pauline M. Newman

Letters to Michael and Hugh [Owens] from P.M. Newman, typescript, May 1951, 6036/008, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Archives, Cornell University, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Ithaca, NY.

Pauline Newman was born in Lithuania around 1890 and came to the United States in 1901. Soon after her arrival, she went to work to help support her family. As a young teenager, she became employed at the Triangle Factory. She was no longer employed there by the time of the fire but she wrote the following description of working conditions at this factory and speaks about why workers endured the indignities. Information on where to obtain more biographical information about Newman is at the end of this letter.

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Dear Boys:

Here I am -- on board the Liberte, en route to Geneva, Switzerland, to attend a meeting of the I.L.O. (International Labor Organization). It is the month of May, 1951. My first class cabin is very comfortable and pleasant. I could not wish for better accomodations (sic). The food is excellent. The service is adequate. The flowers friends and associates sent are delightful and much appreciated. The weather, too, is all one could desire. I have settled down in my deck chair -- relaxed and content. The daily chores, the unavoidable irritations, the worry over big and little things I left behind -- for the time being, at least. Just to sit and watch the changing colors of the sea, now green, then blue and finally merge with the white of the waves -- is like a tonic to a tired body. The sky is a heavenly blue with just a few cumulus clouds. How lovely and how restful! For the moment peace and contentment replaced somber thoughts and a restless spirit. It is, I think, quite natural that I should, under these circumstances, think of you all and wish for your presence.

Thinking of you two, brought to mind the many times you asked me to tell you a story when I was with you and how I would always tell you that I am not very good at storytelling and offered to read to you instead. Now, however, I am beginning to realize that time is passing swiftly and that in the nature of things I shall not be with you much longer. One must resign to the inevitable. I am therefore, going to try and tell you a story, after all -- my own story -- a story which I hope you will, when you grow up, find interesting and informative. There is quite a gap between your life and mine. I would like to, if at all possible, that is, if I can, fill that gap.

[omitted: descriptions of her early childhood in Lithuania, coming to the United States in 1901, becoming politicized, looking for employment, working in a hairbrush factory, hand rolling cigarettes, and sewing buttons on shirtwaists. In the following passage, Newman describes getting a job at the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory.]

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One day a relative of mine who was employed by the now infamous Triangle Shirt Waist Co., the largest manufacturers of shirt waists in New York City, got me a job with that firm. The day I left the Jackson street shop the foreman told me that I was very lucky to have gotten a job with that concern because there is work all year...

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... round and that I will no longer have to look for another job. I found later that workers were actually eager to work for this company because there was steady employment. For me this job differed in many respects from the previous ones. The Triangle Waist Co. was located at Green street and Washington Place. This was quite a distance from my home. Since the day's work began at seven thirty it meant that I had to leave home at six forty, catch the horse car -- yes, boys, there were horse cars in those days, then change for the elctric (sic) trolley at Duane and Broadway and get off at Washington Place. You will be interested to know that both rides cost only a nickel and if I remember a-right the service was much better than it is to-day when we pay fifteen ["fifteen" is crossed out and hand written above it is "20"] cents for a single ride!

The day's work was supposed to end at six in the afternoon. But, during most of the year we youngsters worked overtime until 9 p.m. every night except Fridays and Saturdays. No, we did not get additional pay for overtime. At this point it is worth recording the generocity (sic) of the Triangle Waist Co. by giving us a piece of apple pie for supper instead of additional pay! Working men and women of today who receive time and one half and at times double time for overtime will find it difficult to understand and to believe that the workers of those days were evidently willing to accept such conditions of labor without protest. However, the answer is quite simple -- we were not organized and we knew that individual protest amounted to the loss of one's job. No one in those days could afford the luxory (sic) of changing jobs -- there was no unemployment insurance, there was nothing better than to look for another job which will not be better than the one we had. Therefore, we were, due to our ignorance and poverty, helpless against the power of the exploiters.

As you will note, the days were long and the wages low -- my starting wage was just one dollar and a half a week -- a long week -- consisting more often than not, of seven days. Especially was this true during the season, which in those days were longer than they are now. I will never forget the sign which on Saturday afternoons was posted on the wall near the elevator stating -- "if you don't come in on Sunday you need not come in on Monday"! What choice did we...

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... have except to look for another job on Monday morning. We did not relish the thought of walking the factory district in search of another job. And would we find a better one? We did not like it. As a matter of fact we looked forward to the one day on which we could sleep a little longer, go to the park and get to see one's friends and relatives. It was a bitter disappointment.

My job, like that of the other kids was not strenous (sic). It consisted of trimming off the threads left on the shirt waists by the operators. We were called "cleaners". Hundreds of dozens of shirt waists were carried from the machines to the "children's corner" and put into huge cases. When these were trimmed they were put in similar empty case ready for the examiners to finish the job. By the way, these cases were used for another purpose which served the employers very well indeed. You see, boys, these cases were high enough and deep enough for us kids to hide in, so that when a factory inspector came to inspect the factory he found no violation of the child labor law, because he did not see any children at work -- we were all hidden in the cases and covered with shirt waists! Clever of them, was it not? Somehow the employers seemed to have known when the inspector would come and had time enough to arrange for our hiding place.

As I said before, the job was not strenous (sic). It was tedious. Since our day began early we were often hungry for sleep. I remember a song we used to sing which began with "I would rather sleep than eat". This song was very popular at that time. But there were conditions of work which in our ignorance we so patiently tolerated such as deductions from your meager wages if and when you were five minutes late -- so often due to transportation delays; there was the constant watching you lest you pause for a moment from you work; (rubber heels had just come into use and you rarely heard the foreman or the employer sneak up behind you, watching." You were watched when you went to the lavatory and if in the opinion of the forelady you...

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... stayed a minute or two longer than she thought you should have you were threatened with being fired; there was the searching of your purse or any package you happen to have lest you may have taken a bit of lace or thread. The deductions for being late was stricktly (sic) enforced because deductions even for a few minutes from several hundred people must have meant quite a sum of money. And since it was money the Triangle Waist Co. employers were after this was an easy way to get it. That these deductions meant less food for the worker's children bothered the employers not at all. If they had a conscience it apparently did not function in that direction. As I look back to those years of actual slavery I am quite certain that the conditions under which we worked and which existed in the factory of the Triangle Waist Co. were the acme of exploitation perpetrated by humans upon defenceless (sic) men women and children -- a sort of punishment for being poor and docile.

Despite these inhuman working conditions the workers -- including myself -- continued to work for this firm. What good would it do to change jobs since similar conditions existed in all garment factories of that era? There were other reasons why we did not change jobs -- call them psychological, if you will. One gets used to a place even if it is only a work shop. One gets to know the people you work with. You are no longer a stranger and alone. You have a feeling of belonging which helps to make life in a factory a bit easier to endure. Very often friendships are formed and a common understanding established. These among other factors made us stay put, as it were.

[omitted: descriptions about learning English and studying literature with the Socialist Literary League]

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One evening I was walking home from a long day's work. It was summer. But by evening the air was a bit cool and I rather liked the walk home. The sights were familiar, the usual sighns (sic) of poverty and all the resulting misery therefrom. As I saw the little children playing in the gutter, the men and women looking tired and drab, the dark and filthy tenements I thought -- dear God, will this ever be different? When I got home I sat down and wrote:

"While at work I am thinking only of my own drab existence. I get discouraged and a bit low in my mind - every day the same foreman, the same forelady, the same shirt waists, shirt waists and more shirt waists. The same machines, the same surroundings. The day is long and the task tiresome. In despair I ask -- "dear God will it ever be different?". And on my way home from work I see again those lonely men and women with hopeless faces, tired eyes; harrased (sic) by want and worry -- I again ask "will it ever be different?". I wrote more of the same and when it was done I decided to send it to the Forward. Of course I did not expect it to be accepted or published. I did not think it was good enough for publication. I was not a writer and I knew it. But, I did want to express my feelings and get them down on paper. There was satisfaction in doing just that. I posted the article and did not give it another thought.

A few days later, it was a Saturday, as I was approaching the Triangle factory I noticed a number of my fellow workers holding the Forward and pointing to something, and when they saw me they all shouted congratulation and hailed me as a conquering hero -- for my piece was published! I could hardly believe it! but there it was, my name and all. This I believe was one of the highlights in my life. Perhaps a minor one compared with what was to follow in the years ahead. However, at the time it was an achievement I did not anticipate. Encouraged by the success of my first attempt to give expression to my thoughts and feelings I tried again and again and each time my articles and stories were accepted and published. I became "famous" almost over night. In a small way I became the voice of the less articulate young men and women with whom I worked and with whom later I was to join in the fight for improved working conditions and a better life for us all.

[In the rest of this paper, Newman wrote at length about getting involved in the 1909 Shirtwaist Makers Strike. By the time of the 1911 Triangle Fire, she had moved on to a new role as organizer and activist in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, sparing her the horrors of the fire. She became ILGWU's first full-time woman organizer, spoke at the 1909 Shirtwaist Makers Strike, and went on to become an organizer for the union in the northeast and midwest. In this position, she played a role in numerous major strikes. She founded the ILGWU's Health Center and was Director of Health Education, 1918-1980. Newman's other positions over the years included Advisor to the United States Department of Labor in the 1930s and 1940s, member of the Board of Directors for the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, and she served with the Women's Trade Union League. In short, she led a long, productive life working to provide a positive answer to her question, "Will it ever be different?"]

To learn more about Pauline Newman, her life and career, read Annelise Orleck's book Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States,1900-1965 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

# Lived Amid Flames, But Nearly Drowns

## New York Times, March 26, 1911, p. 4.

At five minutes to 9, four hours after the fire in the Triangle Waist Company factory was discovered, the first living person was found in the debris. He was Hyman Meshel, 21 years old, and single, of 332 East Fifteenth Street, who worked on the eighth floor and was on that floor when the fire threw the garment workers of the waist company, by whom he was employed, into a panic.

The rescue party found Meshel crazed by fright and blackened by soot in the southwest corner of the basement. He was sitting helplessly on the elevator cable drum, with his body immersed almost to the neck in water, which was slowly rising in the basement. The flesh of the palms of his hands had been torn from the bones by his sliding down the steel cable in the elevator, and his knuckles and forearms were fill of glass splinters from beating his way through the glass door of the elevator shaft.

Ambulance Surgeon Flanagan rushed him to St. Vincent's Hospital, where it was said that he might recover if pneumonia did not set in. Meshel was weak and chilled from his four hours' immersion in the cold water of the basement. His legs were paralyzed, and it was a difficult task to restore the circulation.

About 8:45 Battalion Chief Worth and several firemen who were working on the ground floor of the burned building near the Greene Street entrance, heard faint cries for help. They listened intently, and decided that the sounds came from below them. The firemen got a lantern, and under Chief Worth organized themselves into a rescue party.

### **Who the Rescuers Were.**

The men in the group who started out to rescue the unknown prisoner consisted of Firemen Wolff, Boucher, and Levy of Truck 5, and Firemen Rubino and Connell of Truck13. When they entered the basement led by Chief Worth, they found themselves splashing in water up to their knees. Their lanterns proved of little value, and they were obliged to grope their way over a great many obstacles and among a number of floating boxes.

As they groped about they set up concerted shouts with the view of learning the prisoners location by his answers. They finally located his cries as coming from the southwest corner of the building, to which they made their way. In their haste to reach the victim they knocked down three partitions and battered in an iron door in the cellar.

When they reached the main elevator shaft in the southwest corner of the basement they saw a man's head just above water directly above the location of the cable drum on which the elevator cables were wound. A little above the man's head was the floor of the elevator of the building.

The man's eyes were bulging form his head, and he whimpered monotonously like a timid and spirit-broken animal. His face was swollen from heat and looked charred as if it had been scorched and the rubbed with soot.

"Get up, we've come to get you!" shouted Chief Worth.

### **Victim Unable to Rise.**

The man did not reply, though the message was repeated by Chief Worth and echoed by his companions. At last the firemen seized him bodily and carried him out of the building g over the same tortuous route by which they had entered.

It was not till he had been taken to the hospital, place in his bed, his wounds treated and his body massaged that Meshel was able to give any account whatever of how he had reached his strange position.

He said he had been on the eighth floor when the fire started and that he had run over to the elevator shaft. There he beat in the glass upper portion of the shaft door with his fists and swung himself over the wooden lower half into the shaft, going down hand over hand for several floors on the cable, though in the process his flesh was torn from the bone. Just before he got to the bottom he became faint from pain and exertion and dropped onto the roof of the elevator.

When he regained consciousness he said he had to break his way out of the shaft again. He said that a man or several men and a woman had fallen onto the top of the elevator down the shaft near him, and that he was afraid he would be killed if he remained where he was. His statement to this effect had not yet been verified by the firemen.

### **Driven Back by the Flames.**

Once out of the shaft Meshel said he was driven back into the elevator well by the flames all about him, and kept himself under water as much as possible to avoid being burned. The heat, he said, was unbearable.

As the water rose in the basement Meshel began to fear, he said, that he would be drowned, and he climbed up on top of the cable drum and sat there, with his back braced against the wall, while the water crept slowly up to his neck. The cold so paralyzed him then that he was unable to move, and the fear that after suffering so much he would be drowned made him semi-conscious.

After Meshel had told his story he became irrational again and shouted, "My sister! My sister!" When quieted he explained that his sister Annie had been working the same floor with him, and he had not seen her in the group of panicstriken shirtwaist operatives when the shouts of fire were taken up in his floor and the mad rush for the windows began.

It was not known at the hospital what had become of his sister, though efforts were made to bring Meshel some encouraging news.

# MINUTES OF THE HEARING OF THE NEW YORK STATE FACTORY INVESTIGATING COMMISSION, HELD IN THE CITY HALL AT 10:00 A.M.

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NEW YORK, November 17, 1911

Present - HON. ROBERT F. WAGNER, Chairman,  
HON. SENATOR C.M. HAMILTON,  
HON. A.E. Smith, Assemblyman,  
HON. C.W. Phillips, Assemblyman,  
MISS MARY E. DREIER, Commission.

Appearances.

ABRAM I. ELKUS, Esq., Counsel to the Committee.  
BERNARD L. SHIENTAG, Esq., Of Counsel.

WILLIAM L. BEERS, called as a witness and, being duly sworn, testified as follows:

Examination by Mr. ELKUS:

Q. Mr. Beers, were you fire marshal of the city? A. Yes, sir.

Q. Were you connected with the Fire Department, and, if so, for how long? A. I was with the Fire Department for twelve years, up to November 15, when I retired.

Q. During all that time were you Fire Marshall? A. Assistant Fire Marshall and Fire Marshall.

Q. What are the duties of the Fire Marshal? A. To investigate the cause and origin of fires, to prosecute those persons guilty of incendiarism or arson, and, under the charter, previous to the passing of the Hoey law, he had the investigating into such conditions as would cause or promote a fire, or injure a fireman in the course of his duties, and under certain conditions investigate the conduct of firemen at fires.

[Omitted pp. 572-579.]

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Q. Did you visit the Triangle Waist Company Building immediately after the fire? A. Yes, sir.

Q. Did you make an investigation? A. I was there all during the evening of the fire, and was there on the ground the next morning at nine o'clock.

Q. Tell us what you observed. A. The result of my investigation and the taking of testimony for ten days after the fire was that I was of the opinion that the fire occurred on the eighth floor on the Greene street side, under a cutting table, which table was enclosed and that contained the waste material as cut from this lawn that was used to make up the waists. They were in the habit of cutting about 160 to 180 thicknesses of lawn at one time; that formed quite a lot of waste, which was placed under the cutting tables, as it had a commercial value of about seven cents a pound.

Q. Was it boxed, or just placed on the floor? A. Well, the boards that were nailed on the legs of the table formed the box or receptacle.

Q. The outside of that receptacle was wood? A. Yes; it was all wood.

Q. How did the fire start there in that stuff? A. Well, we formed the opinion that it started from the careless use of a match from one of the cutters. They were about to leave to go home, and in those factories they are very anxious to get a smoke just as quick as they get through work.

Q. A man simply lighted a match? A. Yes; and carelessly threw it under there; then the attention of the occupants was called to it, and they tried to extinguish it before they rang in a fire alarm.

Q. Did you examine the fire-escapes of that building? A. After the fire.

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Q. What did you find? A. I found the fire-escape on the rear of the building, which was the only one, and was entirely inadequate for the number of people employed in that building.

Q. Why were they inadequate? A. Too small and too light, and the iron shutters on the outside of the building when opened would have obstructed the egress of the people passing between the stairway and the platform.

Q. How many people were there on the eighth floor? A. something over 250, as I recall it.

Q. How many sewing machines? A. There was a cutting department, and it was partially used for machines for making fine waists. About 220 persons were on the eighth floor, all of whom escaped.

Q. How did they come to escape? A. They went down the stairway and down the fire-escape, some of them.

Q. How about the ninth floor? A. The loss of life was the greatest on the ninth floor. There were about 310 people there.

Q. How many sewing machines? A. Two hundred and eighty-eight.

Q. Now, will you tell the Commission whether or not the place was overcrowded with the machines? A. Yes, sir. All the space that could be utilized there was utilized.

Q. Were any attempts made in that case to extinguish the fire? A. Yes, there were. They used fire pails there, and then attempted to use the fire hose.

Q. What happened to the fire hose? A. Well, they claimed they could not get any water to it.

Q. How about the fire pail, why did not that put out the fire? A. They did not get enough water to put it out. It spread very rapidly. The material is very inflammable, and it travels very fast, and the conditions were there, everything, to build a fire.

Q. How many fires would you say, Marshal, could have been prevented if ordinary precautions were used? A. You mean in the factories?

Q. Yes. A. I am not prepared to say, Mr. Elkus. I am of the opinion that the precautions that are used to safeguard these premises in the form of installation of fire-extinguishing apparatus would have a tendency to keep the fires down to a small size. All fires are...

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...of the same size at the start, and I think the loss and damage would be a great deal less by having available apparatus.

Q. In other words, while a number of these fires might start, if there were proper appliances, they would be prevented from amounting to anything but a very small fire? A. Yes; especially lives would be safeguarded.

Q. Lives would be saved, and money would be saved: A. Yes sir.

Q. What recommendations have you to make for legislation to the Commission with reference to the prevention of fires and the saving of lives, and also with reference to the spread of fires? A. Out of the city and in the city?

Q. Both. A. I think that all manufacturing establishments should have an interior automatic signalling device to call attention to fires when they occur, and they should also have an automatic extinguishing device in the form of sprinklers and of standpipes. Local fire drills should be compulsory and all the exits in factories should be marked, as in theatres, and the factory employees should be drilled the same as the crew of a ship is drilled. The fire station should be known, and the specific duties of each employee should be known in case of fire. That is, some of the men should be directed to get female employees out of the building, and the others should be directed to get the male employees together for the purpose of fighting the fire and holding it in check until such time as assistance came. I think that here in the city, all these loft buildings that are used for manufacturing purposes, the equipment should be standardized and should be as nearly fireproof as possible, and no tenant should be permitted to occupy a building of that kind without first filing a plan showing the way in which the manufacturing apparatus is to be installed, and that should be as near fireproof as possible; and he should not be permitted to fill up his building with a lot of combustible material without proper supervision. The number of persons employed in a given area should be specified and approved and the plan of the building, with the exits all marked, should be posted on the walls of the building, so that it would be there and the employees could become familiar with it, and know just where they are to go in case of fire. Smoking should be absolutely prohibited in such industries as shirt-waist making and light lawn dresses, or where any of those light inflammables are used, chiffons and veilings, straw goods, hat factories, or in any factory using a large quantity of material that is inflammable. I think, also, it would be wise to have lectures in the public schools, under the auspices of the Board of Education, instructing these employes (sic) what to do in case of fire, especially in schools located in these districts where the factory employees reside.

New York (State) Factory Investigating Commission, Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission, 1912, 3 vols. (Albany, New York: The Argus Company, printers, 1912), 2:571, 580-583.